

**CHAPTER III**  
**THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS, AGREEMENTS**  
**AND DECLARATIONS TO INCREASE THE AWARENESS OF UAE**  
**WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS**

To advocate the importance of women's role in government sector, UN Women might have the conventions and covenants to shape the world's view towards the participation of women in politics. However, the supranational body (UN Women) surely needs other prominent institutions and women organizations to bring the missions easier. There are several of many contributions by the UN Women, in which marked the view of UAE towards women representation in politics.

A. International Conventions

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW (1979)

The convention in which comprises of the provisions in which protecting the women from the act of discrimination has become the very framework not only for the United Arab Emirates as a member states of the United Nations, but also for the global entities. The effort by United Nations is generated by the UN Women to bring the notion in the convention; to ensure that no state constitute the state's provisions in which could harm women.

UN Women is consciously seeing United Arab Emirates as the leading state in terms of gender equality promotion in the Arab region. This was proven by the willingness of the respective state, United Arab Emirates to be one of the signatories to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2004. The UAE was fully conscious to ratify the convention as it took women empowerment into account.

## 2. Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (1995)

UAE's national report for the declaration was arranged by the help of General Women's Union (GWU), in which the women organization has been benefitting itself from the information given from the UAE authority. According to the UAE National Report in 2014, UAE has worked on the development of its national strategies, plans and programs of actions in order to implement the Beijing Platform for Action 1995. It was since the UAE's endorsement of the recommendation of the fourth International Conference on Women.

The UAE, within the framework of the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session on the General Assembly in 2000, had submitted its national reports on the achievements and challenges encountered during the implementation of the Beijing Platform since 1995. During that period, the UAE National Reports was also submitted to the Committee of CEDAW, since United Arab Emirates had become one of the countries that ratified the convention. It has been nineteen years for the UAE until the national reports in 2014 was submitted by the General Women's Union

(GWU), had its progress reported to the Committee, including the current challenges affecting the implementation of the Platform, gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as the chances to enhance both notions within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Development Agenda post-2015, by involving the gender perspective.

3. UAE Statement on High-Level Thematic Debate: Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda

The UAE had declared its acceptance on UN Women's 'HeforShe', as its Foreign Minister, H.H. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was the first foreign minister in the Arab world to sign onto such initiative. Although the United Arab Emirates stipulated its challenges in gender gap as a form of implementing the gender equality promotion to the national level, the respective state is ready to welcome the Development Agenda Post-2015 for a better future of UAE women in particular.

United Arab Emirates, on its statement in 2015, however, declared its commitment to elevate the gender equality promotion, especially challenging more women to engage in politics, as well as other similar significant arenas; social, economic, and education. Though, the respective state also believed that it would take time in the process of implementing a full equality, one of them is to empower the Emirati women.

It is inevitable, for the UAE's perspective towards women, that to make women become leaders and meaningful participants in political arena, the government must also recognize and further advocate women's participation. Political participation should also acknowledge women as agent of change; to the extent of women as mediators nor negotiators in peace-building, as justices in the UAE court, as Ministers of State in the government sector.

The general statement of the United Arab Emirates did not abandon the fact that women's participation in political sphere has become the nation's top priorities. A key to national development, however, is the engagement of women in the workforce and decision-making process at the highest levels, including the recognition of women as equal partners of the national development itself, as it was spearheaded by Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak; Founder of the UAE Women's Federation (currently known as General Women's Union), the Chairwoman of the General Women's Union and the Family Development Foundation, also the President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood which launched the national strategy for UAW Women's Development in 2002, to support women's participation in all aspects of life.

Finally, on UAE Statement 2015, the United Arab Emirates reminded the national and international entities to create a space for women to be the best leaders of themselves, included in the decision-makers, along with the persuasion to ensure that local knowledge could be integrated with such notions for the sufficient result.

#### 4. UAE on the International Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952)

Based on the data from OHCHR official website, all of the international agreements participated had showed that the respective state, United Arab Emirates are still not signing the International Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Despite, the most important thing is that the representation of UAE women in the parliament shows a progress in the process. The impressive performance by UAE women in the national and international parliaments elevates the real support of the respective state towards women empowerment.

“Dubai Women Establishment, in which a local organization since 2006, has played an active role in nurturing the next generation of Emirati women leaders – to enable them to continue the efforts of their pioneering predecessors while simultaneously serving as role models to young women in the wider society. In the past few years, Dubai Women Establishment has successfully organized and conducted programs, interactive seminars, training sessions and forums aimed at encouraging more women to join the active work force while simultaneously equipping them with the skills to fulfill their traditional duties as wives and mothers.”

By doing so, the DWE hopes to be a help for the Emirati women to pursue their careers, through the gender equality policies. Also, to provide the Emirati women eternal opportunities in the workforce.

The DWE strives to help Emirati women balance stimulating careers with a satisfying family life through the endorsement of appropriate gender-equality policies and initiatives, providing life-long opportunities for training and work and promoting greater participation of women in the economic and political sphere. The ultimate goal and responsibility of Dubai Women Establishment is to nurture a competent generation of future women leaders by establishing the right infrastructure and platform to ensure and sustain the success and potential of UAE women.

#### B. Women in Parliaments

One of the most important roles of women in the UAE is their political representation in the country. This representation is expected to be the very promotor towards gender equality within the Emirates border. The engagement of Emirati women in politics becomes much prestigious and is advocated by many, including the UN WOMEN, which the most importantly by the government. A recognition for women to get themselves involved in male-dominated arena only added the proof that women in the UAE begins to strengthen their roles in a very vital sector, aside from the education, economy and business. The author of this undergraduate thesis previously mentioned that Emirati women had performed an impressive participation in the election held by the FNC in 2006. A historical milestone scored by the Emirati women had elevated their quality to later on compete equally with men candidates in the national political arena, in which the

women candidates were equally capable of running effective campaigns. Though, they were only permitted to have half of the candidates as their choice, while the rest candidates were more influential under the ruling families' authority.

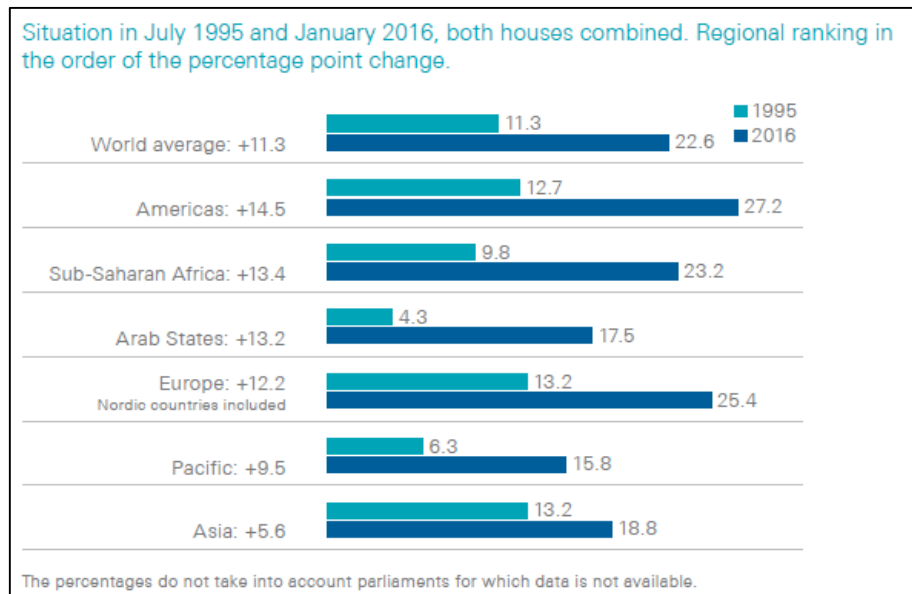
In a total of 67 or 25.1 per cent of parliamentary chambers across the world, women now represent more than 30 per cent of the membership. A slightly higher percentage of upper houses (27.6%) include more than 30 per cent women, compared to single or lower houses (24.1%). Following elections in 2015 to single or lower houses, two countries returned to the prestigious "30%+" group (United Republic of Tanzania and Switzerland), while five were included for the first time (Ethiopia, Trinidad and Tobago, El Salvador, Portugal and Sudan). Both parliamentary chambers in Ethiopia and in Trinidad and Tobago reached the 30%+ milestone"<sup>20</sup>. Surprisingly, none of the countries mentioned the achievement of the Arab states, particularly the United Arab Emirates, to enlist one of the 30% + group.

The figure below was taken from the Inter-Parliamentary Union report in 2016, regarding to the women in parliaments as well as the regional and national ranks. The Arab regions and the United Arab Emirates as a state in the region experienced quite significant progress in the participation of women in the parliaments. Below are both figures that would show us the memorable performance by the women of United Arab Emirates and the Arab region.

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<sup>20</sup> IPU. (2016). *Women in Parliament in 2015*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Figure 3. 1 Arab states saw its significant progress from 1995 to 2016



To put to a comparison to the global women representation in politics, Arab states needs to work better on the women quota in the parliaments. However, the Inter-Parliamentary Union ensured that over the last two decades, there are two main things that are changed. Firstly, the range of countries whose single or lower house where women’s representation is more than 30% is significantly more diverse. Twelve years ago, the group was dominated by the Nordic countries, while in 2016 as the research was conducted, IPU found that countries from the sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Europe, the Arab states and Asia filled in the impressive group. Second thing that changed was the percentage of women in the parliamentarians is much higher than twenty years ago, in which only one had reached the 40 per cent mark. Nowadays, IPU noted that 14 out of 46 single or lower houses exceed that of 40 per cent.



By looking up the IPU research on women in politics across the world, UAE Government is quite challenged by the statistic result. Emirati women are definitely in need of the quota in parliament. Women's quota in parliament means women are reserved seats in parliament for women, designed by the UAE government in order to work better on empowering women's role in politics. United Arab Emirates had recognised the importance of Gender Balance Council—in which set up by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, headed by Sheikha Manal Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum—as a step to the right direction for the gender equality within the UAE, as it sets out to take its place among the world's most innovative and prosperous nations. According to Dr. Lamyia N Fawwaz<sup>21</sup> interview with *The Gulf Today* in 2015, the UAE that is known with its progressive and forward-thinking, the country might be ready to face a new phase for its social and economy. Dr. Fawwaz continuously stated that for the last ten years, United Arab Emirates had also performed its significant improvement in many sectors. Through the positive efforts of the Gender Balance Council and other bodies, the United Arab Emirates could be focusing more to achieve women participation<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Lamyia N. Fawwaz is the *Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Public Affairs at Masdar Institute of Science and Technology.*

<sup>22</sup>Fawwaz, D. L. (2015, August 25). Unprecedented Quota for UAE Women on Boards. (T. G. Today, Interviewer)

To argue the participation of women in the parliament, Drude Dahlerup<sup>23</sup> stated in her writing in a section of book edited by Kazuki Iwanaga that to provide women quota in politics has been a worldwide trend<sup>24</sup>. *Gender quota* drew her attention that it implies to certain number of percentage of the candidates election or of those actually elected shall be women. Dahlerup believed that more than 50 countries nowadays are introducing gender quotas in their constitutions or electoral regulations. Moreover, in many other countries, major political parties had introduced their own voluntary party rules stipulating for gender quotas. Aside from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans and South Asia, gender quotas are also being instituted in Arab countries, where religious and ethnic quotas have been known quite well.

The United Arab Emirates, however, has not yet offered quota for women, the data was retrieved from the Inter-Parliamentary Union report 2015. Though, the percentage of women in 2015 election scored 23.6 per cent, the candidates ran for 2015 election did not even grasp 15 per cent for its success rate. Clearly, the United Arab Emirates where the country has not yet implemented the voluntary quota, supporting the result of the low percentage of women's success two years ago.

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<sup>23</sup>Drude Dahlerup is a professor of Political Science at Stockholm University. Her main research area is gender and politics.

<sup>24</sup>Iwanaga, K. (2008). *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.

Inter-Parliamentary Union report 2016 had stipulated the importance of applying gender quota for each state to support the representation of women in the parliament. In UAE case, the women in parliament has never been really changed in terms of number due to the non-appliance of gender quota for women in the UAE parliament.

*Figure 3. 2 The amount of Emirati women ran for candidates*

|                                  | Total No. | No. Men | No. Women | % Women | Success rate | Quota  |
|----------------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|--------------|--------|
| <b>Majority Electoral system</b> |           |         |           |         |              |        |
| Comoros                          | 203       | 198     | 5         | 2.5%    | 20.0%        | No     |
| Ethiopia (lower house)           | 1828      | 1527    | 301       | 16.5%   | 70.4%        | Yes ** |
| Haiti (lower house)              | 1621      | 1492    | 129       | 8.0%    | 0.0%         | Yes*   |
| Haiti (upper house)              | 232       | 209     | 23        | 9.9%    | 0.0%         | Yes*   |
| Marshall Islands                 | 98        | 93      | 5         | 5.1%    | 60.0%        | No     |
| Nigeria (lower house)            | 1730      | 1504    | 226       | 13.1%   | 8.8%         | No     |
| Nigeria (upper house)            | 747       | 619     | 128       | 17.1%   | 5.5%         | No     |
| Poland (upper house)             | 423       | 365     | 58        | 13.7%   | 22.4%        | No     |
| Tuvalu                           | 32        | 29      | 3         | 9.4%    | 33.3%        | No     |
| United Arab Emirates             | 330       | 252     | 78        | 23.6%   | 11.5%        | No     |
| United Kingdom (lower house)     | 3971      | 2938    | 1033      | 26.0%   | 18.5%        | Yes ** |
| United Republic of Tanzania      | 1250      | 1012    | 238       | 19.0%   | 57.1%        | Yes*   |

The respective state reached a total 17.5% for women representation in parliament. Around 78 women candidates stood up for 2015 election, compared to the 85 in 2011. The 40 member Federal National Council (FNC) included 9 women (in which reached 22.5%), only one of whom was directly elected, Naama Al Sharhan. To sum up, 78 women won 10% of the overall vote. The United Arab Emirates saw a significant milestone when Amal Al-Qubaisi was the first elected woman as Speaker of the FNC and also the first woman in the Arab World to hold such vital position in the parliamentary. Continuing the Inter-Parliamentary Union's statistic report in 2015, the rise of women's leadership is remarked by the

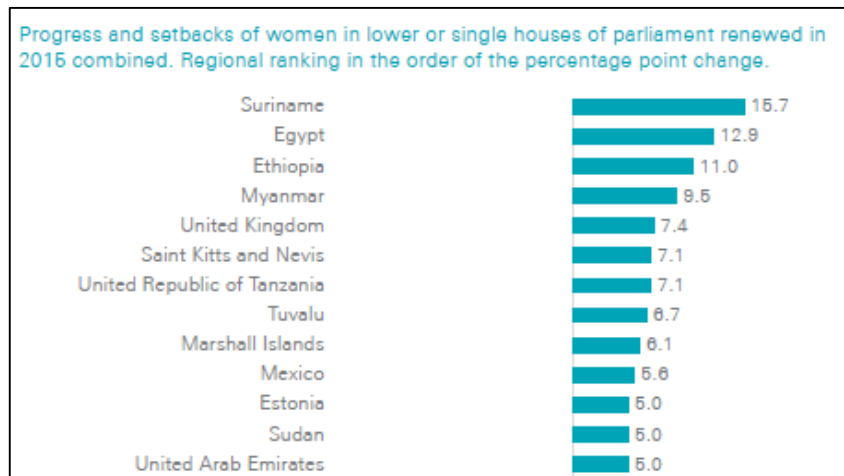
number of women Speakers of Parliament that reached a quite high number in most of the time by the end of 2015, in which 49 (or 17.9% of total number of Speakers). The number increased by 6 as it scored 43 in the early 2015. Eight countries resulted to appointed women Speakers, as the appointment is being the first for United Arab Emirates, Nepal and Namibia.

Although the respective state, United Arab Emirates, is enlisted in countries that shows the prominent image for the Arab countries' range, the UAE government remains encountering the challenge to work better on the women's opportunity in government sector, particularly in parliaments. The numbers of UAE women in parliaments to be compared to other range of countries remain low. Also, the fact that UAE government has not yet taken an act in instituting gender quotas for Emirati women is somehow still limiting women's movement in political arena. Political participation in the Arab states is the lowest in the world, with women representation is only reached 9.1% of all members of parliament in the region by 2007<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup>Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2009). *Women in National Parliaments*. Retrieved from Inter-Parliamentary Union: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

Figure 3. 3 The UAE's bar moved to the right side shows its progress



The chart above was taken from the same source; Inter-Parliamentary Union; on its annual review of Women in Parliaments in 2015. As it is seen, United Arab Emirates is still in need to increase its progress number in comparison with the global women participation. The Inter-Parliamentary Union believes that applying the gender quota for women would best underpin them to increasing their numbers in the parliaments. In 2015, women have won almost a quarter of the reserved seats in the parliaments. More women appeared and likely won the seats when the political parties apply the voluntary quotas. However, it is a definite if this has the dominant political parties take the role stronger than the oppositions. Either way, it is merely clear that women fare significantly better when quotas are implemented. The IPU noted that women from the countries without the adaption of gender quotas have only won 13.6% of the available seats<sup>26</sup>. The more quota

<sup>26</sup> IPU. (2015). *Women in Parliament in 2015*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

provided, the more percentage of women voters are counted. Particularly to the government of UAE, gender quota is presumably one of the top priorities that needs to put into a consideration for the Emirati future in political sphere.